



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Message from the Director

There is good news about America's youth. They finally are getting the message. After decades of steady increase, the overall number of teenagers who now experiment with and use tobacco, alcohol and other drugs has shown a marked decline. We have many people to thank for this welcome news, beginning with young people themselves, their parents, their teachers and the numerous positive role models who interact with them in the schools and communities where they live. In Virginia, we owe a deep debt of gratitude, as well, to the thousands of dedicated substance abuse prevention specialists who work with our kids day-in and day-out to keep them on the path to a healthy future by keeping them away from the destructive influences of illegal drug use, alcohol and tobacco. These helpers run the gamut – from child care specialists working with toddlers and teachers working with students, to senior citizens, parents and faith leaders working with young people in their homes and in their neighborhoods. All have made a positive difference in the lives of thousands of young Virginians. The Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (GOSAP) congratulates these people, even as it works continually to improve and expand their vital role in creating a brighter future for all Virginians. Our collective efforts to keep Virginia's kids safe and drug-free are most visible in local communities throughout the state. Through the supportive activities of GOSAP, those communities share in a statewide commitment, made at the very top of State government, to pursue the important goal of preventing youth substance abuse for every child and adolescent in the Commonwealth.

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Committed Together to Virginia's Youth

Weaving State Resources

Created in 2000 by an act of the Virginia General Assembly (Virginia Code §2.2-118), the GOSAP is responsible for coordinating substance abuse activities in the Commonwealth, providing competitive grants to proven prevention and violence reduction programs at the community level, promoting youth academic achievement, improving the statewide effectiveness and accountability of substance abuse prevention programs and expenditures, and serving as Virginia’s liaison to substance abuse prevention services and providers working at the local, regional and national levels. To better leverage available statewide resources, the GOSAP Collaborative, consisting of members from the following state governmental agencies, was established in 2002:

- ★ Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control
- ★ Department of Criminal Justice Services
- ★ Department of Education
- ★ Department of Fire Programs
- ★ Department of Health
- ★ Department of Juvenile Justice
- ★ Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services
- ★ Department of Motor Vehicles
- ★ Department of Social Services
- ★ Department of State Police
- ★ Virginia Army National Guard
- ★ Virginia Tobacco Settlement Foundation

Supporting Parents, Educators, Public Safety Professionals and Youth

To succeed in the goal of instilling positive life-long attitudes and healthy social behaviors among children and adolescents, GOSAP-supported substance abuse prevention programs consciously work to involve those people who mean the most to youth and have the greatest influence on their decisions – their peers, their parents and their teachers. Every teaching tool or curriculum developed by GOSAP for use in any of its sponsored programs is aligned with Virginia’s Standards of Learning objectives and designed to promote improved academic performance. Teachers and parents join with children and adolescents in the following GOSAP sponsored programs:

- ★ KIDsafe Virginia
- ★ Governor’s Youth Public Safety Advisory Council (GYPSAC)
- ★ Youth Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Project (YADAPP)



Empowering Communities

The GOSAP recognizes that no single approach to preventing youth substance abuse can succeed everywhere. Community leaders know best what will work for them, given their local population characteristics and other conditions. Therefore, the GOSAP strongly supports and celebrates the diversity of programs and services operated by local community coalitions and organizations. Each year, the GOSAP uses federal funds allocated under the U.S. Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program to provide approximately \$1.8 million in grants and contracts to local organizations and community coalitions throughout the state in order to implement substance abuse prevention programs and services and to disseminate information about them. These funds help communities implement model substance abuse prevention programs that – through rigorous evidenced-based evaluation – have been proven to work. In addition, 20 Virginia communities established model substance abuse prevention programs with up to \$360,000 each, awarded to the GOSAP under the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention’s three-year State Incentive Grant Program. The needs, concerns and contributions of locally-based substance abuse prevention providers are communicated to the Governor’s Office on a regular basis by members of the GOSAP Council, consisting of representatives from local coalitions, private and non-profit sector organizations, and faith-based entities.



Advocating, Educating and Training

In Virginia, there is perhaps no organization better positioned than the GOSAP to carry the statewide banner for promoting the importance of youth substance abuse prevention to legislators, policymakers and the general public. While many community-based coalitions and organizations have enjoyed great success in telling the prevention message and garnering local support, these success stories and the great accomplishments of our statewide prevention community too often go unnoticed. The GOSAP sponsors an annual statewide prevention conference to provide professional training for substance abuse prevention providers and to heighten public awareness about the need to support prevention programs and services. There is good reason: Prevention is cost-effective. For every dollar invested in a substance abuse prevention program, \$5.60 in cost-savings is realized (*Center for Substance Abuse Research, University of Maryland*). Work force development and providing training for Virginia’s substance abuse prevention specialists is another important GOSAP priority. In partnership with James Madison University, the GOSAP sponsors an ongoing series of Prevention Basics courses for specialists at three skill and experience levels: beginning, intermediate and advanced.

Protecting and Respecting: Never Too Young and Never Too Old

Preventing youth substance abuse is everyone’s business. Established research has shown that resilient kids come in greater numbers from resilient communities. Environment matters. Environmental approaches to community-wide conditions that make access to illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco either easier or more difficult than the norm also matter greatly. In this sense – preserving overall communities and making them more drug-resistant places for our kids to grow – is an essential part of sound substance abuse prevention strategy. How can exposure to substance abuse prevention messages and services at any age be too young when so many babies are born already addicted to illegal drugs, or affected by fetal alcohol syndrome, because of a drug-abusing parent? And what of the other end of the age spectrum? What age is too old for people to be actively engaged in the mission to keep kids and adolescents on the right track and away from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs? We believe no age is too old. Powerful recent evidence suggests that senior citizens and kids working together in mentoring relationships benefit mutually from their regular interaction. With its Protect & Respect Intergenerational Programs, the GOSAP has put this principle into practice in numerous communities throughout the state, where older Virginians are engaged with youth in mentoring and community-wide crime prevention and safety projects.

Paving the Path to a Brighter Future

The GOSAP Collaborative is in the process of implementing the five-year statewide strategic plan: *Gaining Traction: A Substance Abuse Prevention Plan for Virginia’s Youth*. The development of this plan represents the consensus of Virginia’s prevention community and includes short- and long-term recommendations for making our successful substance abuse prevention programs even better in the years ahead. Whether it’s working with partners at the state and federal levels to improve the overall effectiveness and accountability of statewide substance abuse programs, disbursing critically needed financial support to rural and urban community coalitions, establishing public/private partnerships like KIDsafe Virginia or Protect & Respect, offering training courses for prevention professionals and specialists, or working with other agencies to develop a long-range vision for the future of youth substance abuse programs and outcomes in Virginia, the GOSAP is committed to the drug-free success of Virginia’s youth, families and communities ...each and every one. Please join us!